



[Baruch Spinoza, 1632 - 1677](#)

# Renaissance and Enlightenment

The longer part of today's attached and linked text, on Alberti and Spinoza, written by Anthony Blunt, describes the [Italian Renaissance](#) (= "rebirth") through the life and work of [Leon Battista Alberti](#) (1404-1472). The Renaissance is significant as an intermediate high point of humanism between the ancient Greek and Roman worlds and the modern, Marxist world. The Renaissance followed the European "Dark Ages" and "Middle Ages". The Renaissance thinkers drew upon Arab, Indian and Chinese culture as well as on that of the Ancients who had slept for a thousand years beneath their Italian feet. This piece of writing can also help to show how the unity of historical thought that Hegel later theorised had in practice been realised.

The Italian Renaissance, based on reason and the understanding that humans can and do by themselves develop human culture; and that human culture is not limited by the extent of the knowledge of the ancients, or by any other interior limitation. The Italian Renaissance at its peak represents a pure form of humanism – the best-developed in history up to that time.

The Italian Renaissance was later overcome by its own internal reactionary forces (e.g. see the last paragraph of Blunt's account), but humanism did not then sleep for as long as it had slept after the fall of the Roman Empire. It quickly rose again in Northern Europe, led in particular by the work of [Baruch Spinoza](#) (1632-1637) among others, in a movement known as [The Enlightenment](#), which we may regard as continuing up to the time of Hegel, and therefore up to the dawn of Marxism. A short piece of Spinoza's writing is given at the end of the Anthony Blunt document.

The following quotation is from a [Spinoza page on MIA](#). It shows how Spinoza's thought prepares the way for Engels' thought:

*“That thing is said to be FREE (libera) which exists by the mere necessity of its own nature and is determined to act by itself alone. That thing is said to be NECESSARY (necessaria), or rather COMPELLED (coacta), which is determined by something else to exist and act in a certain fixed and determinate way.”*

These writings show the development of understanding of the dialectic of Freedom and Necessity, and the closely-related, parallel dialectic of Subject and Object. They can help one to understand the philosophical ground upon which Marx and Engels stood. For further reading on Spinoza, see the Soviet philosopher [Evald Ilyenkov's essay on Spinoza](#) on MIA, where Ilyenkov remarks, and then quotes Hegel, as follows:

*"...he was probably the only one of the great thinkers of the pre-Marxian era who knew how to unite brilliant models of acutely dialectical thought with a consistently held materialist principle (rigorously applied throughout his system) of understanding thought and its relations to the external world lying in the space outside the human head.*

*"The influence of Spinoza's ideas on the subsequent development of dialectical thought can hardly be exaggerated. 'It is therefore worthy of note that thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all Philosophy.' [[Lectures on the History of Philosophy](#), Hegel]*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Alberti and Spinoza compilation, Blunt, Spinoza](#).
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